

part and own part, and that only about a fourth are entirely tenants. Many of the tenants, moreover, rent their fields from the communal holdings of the clan to which they belong. Peasant proprietors have acquired their land chiefly through inheritance, although transfer by sale or mortgage is not unusual. The division of ancestral acres through successive generations of heirs has made for the smallness of the tracts farmed. Inherited ownership, it may be noted, promotes a stable rural population. Probably much less than half of the work on the farms—on the average—is done by hired labor, and most of this appears to be of local origin and not migratory. The rural population, staying by its ancestral acres unless uprooted by some such catastrophe as a famine or a war, has had and continues to have a profound effect on Chinese society. Conservatism and stability in outlook and customs are of its essence.

Not only are the total holdings of any one farmer small, but in turn they are usually made up of still smaller tracts scattered in several places about the village and separated from the farmhouse, on the average, by a distance of from a third to half a mile. As inevitable corollaries, such farms cannot be cultivated as units, it becomes difficult if not impossible for one peasant to fight plant and animal diseases without the cooperation of his neighbors (often not easily obtained), time and energy are lost in going from one plot to another, and labor-saving machinery cannot be employed to advantage. It is an inefficient form of rural organization. Moreover, a large proportion of the farms prove too small for economical cultivation. It is the larger farms which are most profitable.

With these small holdings and the intensive

application of human labor, the density of population in some portions of China is almost unbelievable. The survey which shows that farms average a little over five acres also discloses the fact that the average family supported by each is 5.7 persons. The most crowded rural sections have more inhabitants per square mile than Bengal, the most thickly settled part of India, or that rural Japan.

A standard of living inevitably follows which, from the Western standpoint, is appallingly low. To this contributes the fact that, especially in the North, where the growing season is shorter, there are some months when labor cannot be applied to the land.